

**Since 1991, 105 churches in 28 states and the District of Columbia have received Union Presbyterian Seminary Congregational Leadership Awards.**

**Presenting the 2014 award recipients:**  
*(Judging panelists' comments are italicized)*



**University Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, Texas** received the **Al Dimmock Award for its excellence and congregational involvement in the empowerment of older adults.** University Presbyterian Church began offering courses through the Sources of Light (SoL) Center in the fall of 2001. Since that time, the program has grown from 120 participants in its first two terms (2001-2002) to more than 1,100 adults in the 2009 and 2010 terms. As the program has grown, participation has expanded into the greater San Antonio Community, and the SoL Center Board of Directors has reflected the diversity of support, as current and past board members represent Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths, as well as Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterian denominations. This diverse group of leaders has worked tirelessly to expand the reach of the SoL Center which has offered courses in areas including Theology, Interfaith Dialogue, Ecology, Spiritual Practice, and more. A highlight of the center is the Ambassador Program, which enhances the participation of older adults by providing training in leadership and hospitality so that older adults may serve as hosts for both courses and other events.

*“This program invites leadership and great hospitality practices as well as regular training and classes focused on a wide range of older adult needs and interests. This is an amazing emerging response to the disaster of 9/11 and the continuing needs of the 21st century. Wonderful!”*



**First Presbyterian Church of Lafayette, Louisiana** received the **Elinor Curry Award** for its ministry of outreach and social concern that addresses the call of the church to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God,” and in so doing changes the congregation. First Presbyterian Church is a smaller congregation, with approximately 120 members, but has a much larger impact on the community. Following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the congregation opened its doors to the displaced and became a founding member of C.U.P.S. (Communities Uniting in Prayer and Service), an organization which originally provided support to those affected by Katrina, but now serves families affected by natural disasters, house fires, illness and other events. In 2007, a member of the congregation began making gift baskets from the abundance of material goods donated to C.U.P.S. She began the ministry from a bedroom in her home, but it quickly outgrew that space. First Presbyterian donated unused space to house the ministry. Now, volunteers of all ages, including Sunday school classes and homebound members as well as volunteers from a variety of local churches and organizations work together to assemble and distribute the baskets. These age- and gender-specific baskets are intended to enrich the recipient’s life and to show God’s love. Every basket contains both practical and fun items, including hygiene items, books, toys, jewelry, wallets, ties, scarves, socks, games, candles, dish towels, ornaments, and decorations. Whenever possible, the baskets make use of recycled materials; for example, old crayons are melted down to make new ones and bottle caps are recycled into pieces for board games. These baskets are then distributed at Christmas and Easter. Special birthday baskets are made for adults and LARC (Lafayette Area Retarded Citizens), and for disadvantaged children in the community. The growing support from the community has enabled the program to grow from distributing 250 baskets in its first year to 1,700 baskets in 2013. As the program has grown, the congregation has established a theology of abundance and joy in sharing that abundance. Worship attendance has more than doubled since the basket ministry began, and the congregation is becoming more diverse through that process.

*“This is a small church accomplishing a significant mission. The Basket ministry has led to increase in membership and attendance. Best intergenerational participation of all the Elinor Curry applications.”*



## **Beacon New Church Development of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

**received the James Goodpasture Award for excellence in ministry to persons with developmental disabilities and to their families.** Beacon New Church Development, in the post-industrial Kensington area of Philadelphia, began with the goal being a safe space proclaiming the gospel in a neighborhood struggling with poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, domestic violence, and addiction. Beacon quickly recognized in its neighbors the strength of those who have overcome significant obstacles and the generosity of those who look after each other regardless of position. In 2011, following time spent walking the neighborhood and communicating with their neighbors, the congregation decided to offer arts and education programs after school and in the summers for the children of the community. Through these programs, the congregation came to know Sarah,\* a young woman with pervasive developmental disorder, autism, and a significant seizure disorder. The congregation's experience with Sarah was formative, and they quickly learned the importance of inclusion and meeting people where they are, not only in providing services, but in celebrating the contributions of all people to the community. This has led Beacon to recognize the call to provide regular trained and professional volunteer support to welcome students with severe learning disabilities, autism, emotional difficulties, and at least one other student with a seizure disorder. Sarah's prophetic voice has helped Beacon recognize the importance of ministering to the whole of God's people and learning to communicate across all types of distance.

\*Name has been changed

*"The emerging vision of Beacon is brilliant! The expansion of the children/youth activities to include people with developmental needs is great. Many organizations would have run away rather than embracing such needs. The interaction with the community and the personal story of "Sarah" embody gospel hospitality. The creative response to her needs and empowering her involvement in the congregation and community is very strong and inspiring."*



**New Hope Presbyterian Church of Orange, California** is one of two churches selected for the Katherine Hawes Award for its effective youth ministry that engages youth in all areas of the church's mission, extending beyond the church into the community and the world. New Hope is a five-year old African American church plant of the 1001 Worshiping Communities movement. The congregation borders Santa Ana, a city known for urban poverty and crime, made up largely of first and second generation Hispanic immigrants. Because of the combination of poverty-related issues and the fact that many students are learning English as a second language, standardized test results have been poor, resulting in cuts in school funding and the elimination of the school music program. In response to the needs to the community, the congregation met with school leaders and asked how they could help. After hearing about the cuts to the music programs, the congregation realized that their dynamic musical talent could be used to benefit both the students in their congregation and in the school district. In the four years since the program began, the Hope Alive Youth Music Ministry has hosted an annual benefit concert featuring student performers playing alongside famous artists including several Grammy winners, subsidized the salary for a part-time music teacher in the schools, established a youth orchestra and chorale, opened a violin studio which teaches the Suzuki method, offered scholarships to any students who need them, and provided opportunities for students to perform with and learn from professional musicians and artists throughout the year and during a Summer Music Academy. As the ministry has grown, the partnership with the local schools has grown stronger, as has the congregation itself. Every year, members are transformed by their meaningful relationships with the local students and families, and the overall congregation expresses a contagious joy by loving and serving the community.

*"I am very impressed that this congregation is so involved in the community and works so hard to fund the musical programs at two schools. Wonderful initiative in responding to a community need. This program absolutely blew me away."*



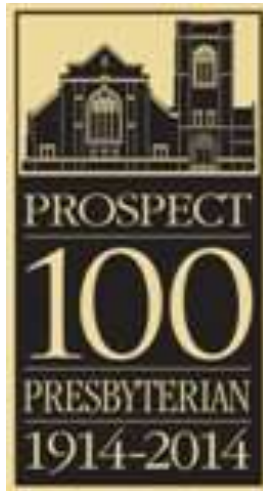
**Northern Lakes Community Church of Northern Lakes, Michigan** is one of two churches selected for the Katherine Hawes Award for its effective youth ministry that engages youth in all areas of the church's mission, extending beyond the church into the community and the world. In the past 17 years, Northern Lakes Community Church, a congregation of about 125 members, has sent 87 young adults into the world. Youth Ministry was not originally the focus of Northern Lakes Community Church; however God sent the church a number of individuals uniquely talented in youth work. In the words of Northern Lakes Community Church, "They created the ministry, still, it must be said that while we disciple the youth, they led the church. The whole church." Youth sing in the Praise Team, serve on the Board of Deacons, and have repeatedly successfully petitioned the session to make significant changes in budget and program, including beginning a weekly youth-led movie night open to the entire community. The youth set up the entire event, select secular movies with spiritual themes, and lead discussion afterwards. The entire congregation is behind this youth ministry. Four adults serve as youth leaders, two more teach youth Sunday school classes, between six and ten adults accompany youth on their annual mission trip, and one elder's entire portfolio is youth ministry. Other youth programs include annual mission trips, frequently to areas recently affected by natural disaster, 'scarf bombing' in which the youth distribute scarves, hats and mittens around town with signs inviting people to take them, and many other incredible programs. Many members have remarked that the youth ministry has had such a profound effect on the congregation that they cannot even imagine what Northern Lakes Community Church would be without it, but one elder who has served in several congregations noted, "It would have slower, quieter music, which would make some old souls happy, but would deprive many others of a really important thing. It would be cleaner, which would make the custodian happy, but would leave a hole in my heart. And we would probably never have known that youth today can be such high quality people."

*"It is impressive that a congregation begins with a strong youth ministry and expects it to remain a cornerstone of the ministry....That they had two youth and one adult (the Pastor) co-writing the application spoke volumes for their involvement. Love it! This is being church."*



**St. Luke's Presbyterian Church of Titusville, Florida** is the recipient of this year's Louise McComb Award for excellence in Christian education for older adults. St. Luke's RECESS ministry began as a monthly fellowship activity to bring an avenue of fun and fellowship for those members of the congregation who were lonely, hurting, or in need of a social outlet for general well-being. Over time, the program evolved into an evangelism and outreach activity as non-members came to represent at least 50% of participants. This growth among non-members has contributed to a growth in attendance from 20-30 to 85-100 every month. RECESS ordinarily meets in the fellowship hall at 10:30 a.m. on the fourth Monday of every month, and features a devotional, 45 minutes of entertainment, and a delicious home-cooked meal, though occasionally the program will take day trips instead. Through the program, older adults are learning more about God and Church, becoming more knowledgeable about other programs in the community that are available to them, and are building valuable relationships with each other and with congregation members. The program has led the congregation to become much more active in the lives of their older neighbors through volunteering at and cooking for the monthly event and nurturing the relationships that have developed.

*"The fact that this program has grown so indicates its place in the church community and outside the walls. RECESS sounds like a great program!"*



**Prospect Presbyterian Church of Maplewood, New Jersey is the recipient of this year's W.T. "Tolly" Thompson Award for creatively meeting a vital Christian Education need in the church community.** Prospect Presbyterian Church has spent the past three years committed to becoming a truly intergenerational church. Long before that, children were active in worship, reading and performing Scripture, leading music, collecting the offering, and giving announcements, but Christian education programs were still segregated by age. Following a study undertaken by the Christian Education Ministry Team, which affirmed the congregation's long held values of inclusivity and family, the congregation began seeking to build intergenerational relationships as a means of nurturing lasting faith. The congregation began with Sensational Sundays, a monthly gathering of all ages in the Fellowship Hall during the educational hour. This ministry is an interactive hour with all ages exploring the lectionary text through a variety of activities. During an impromptu drama of the parable about the ten bridesmaids, those bridesmaids ranged in age from 5 to 60. Grandmothers in their Sunday best kneel next to six-year olds to write and illustrate messages from scripture in sidewalk chalk. Parents and grandparents are learning the names and interests, of children and children are building meaningful relationships with people in their parents' and grandparents' generations. Older church members, who initially expressed reservations about interpreting scripture dramatically, have learned new things about themselves and scripture, and younger people are being exposed to a broad variety of ways adults live out their faith.

*"Great to hear of true inter-generational ministry! The analysis of Christian educational needs in the church is being well met by this change in emphasis. The annual retreat and Sensational Sundays sounds like creative times of energetic sharing which is having an impact on worship and the lives of the families."*